Why 'FernGully: The Last Rainforest' Is *Thematically* About Sex

An Essay by Chelsea Jade Banks

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I dedicate this essay to the late great Tim Curry, who left us not even a week prior to this dedication. He was the main element of sexuality in this film, even to people who have only seen it once. I had no idea that he would pass during the writing of this very essay which I only started to prove that you absolutely can write a 10-page essay about something without the use of artificial intelligence. Thank you, Mr. Curry for everything you've done for entertainment and the LGBTQ+ community. Rest in peace. May your spirit not only be stuck in a tree but in all of our hearts for eternity.

You know you're getting old when the decade you were born during becomes a meme. Earlier this year in March it became a trend for celebrities to share throwback pictures of themselves from this era. Before this happened, I wondered why the 90's never became a cherished nostalgic time like the 80's or early 2000's have. It's my personal opinion that most people, even those who have lived through it, don't remember the 90's very well at all. Aside from shallow aesthetics like those jazzily designed paper cups and how much more whimsical an experience it was just visiting your local McDonalds. If there's one thing out there that perfectly marries quintessential 90's goodness and something that people don't remember (but desperately want you to believe they do, for some odd reason) it's the 1992 20th Century Fox animated flick *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. Everything from the eclectic soundtrack to the protagonist's "big hair" 'do, to its central message of "save the rainforest" is proof of that. But what if I told you there was a little more to this movie than meets the eye?

Much like the 90's itself, people tend to only remember the superficial things about *FernGully.* But there have been a handful of people, like myself, who have noticed that there are strange standout moments and elements of this movie that seem a bit too mature. Almost to the point where these moments feel out of place in a movie structured to inspire children to become environmentalists. Naturally, most family movies have an adult joke for the parents ferreted away here or there. But in FernGully, it's much more than a few jokes. I've been watching this movie my whole life and I've found that the mature themes of sexuality are woven into the fabric of the story. I've attempted to explain to people on the internet what I mean by this plenty of times. I've even presented people with the proof I've provided within this very essay, and yet people still choose not to believe me. This essay isn't designed to change anyone's opinion, per se, but is rather the best way I knew how to express my own opinion.

The best place to begin would be diving into the relationship between the two main protagonists; Crysta and Zak (I should probably mention that most male fans remember Crysta's outfit the best out of everything else in this movie, so we can call that point number 1). Crysta is a young protégé of magic being taught by the communal fairy matriarch, Magi. The movie begins with Magi explaining fairy history and why humans have all but forgotten that fairies exist. But Crysta cannot concentrate because she's distracted. The next character we get introduced to is her male fairy companion, Pips. Pips (dressed even more skimpily than Crysta, might I add) criticizes the fact that Crysta spends so much time with Magi. Crysta responds "Well, what can I learn from you?" Pips reacts by possessively grabbing her hand before she can fly away. YouTuber Pug Mugsly comments on this scene in her review of the film:

"Maybe it's just me reading into this, but I feel like the little hand grab was like him saying "Oh, I'll show you what you can learn from me."

Zak is another young person around Crysta's age but he's also human. The movie makes it clear that his and Crysta's cultures differ from one another. This is demonstrated well early on, when Zak extends his hand to introduce himself, expecting Crysta to shake it. Instead, Crysta just extends her own hand toward him, mimicking his movement while introducing herself. The relationship between Zak and Crysta is sweet, but it never quite loses that little bit of *awkwardness*. The scene that shows this the best is the grotto scene, where the two escape after an impromptu dance number that came on from Zak turning on his cassette player in front of the other fairies. This scene is littered with phallic imagery if you take a glimpse at the surrounding rock formations. At one point, Crysta grabs Zaks hands making a vaguely sexual facial expression as she does. The pairs hands begin to glow blue and, after this, Crysta seems very satisfied with herself. She smiles at Zak, as if expecting him to feel the same way. This action has, perhaps jokingly, been referred to as "fairy sex" by Lindsay Ellis, whose thoughts I will elaborate on later on this essay. Zak kisses Crysta for the first time here, but Crysta pulls away, looking confused. Zak looks down to discover that he has been floating in midair with Crysta. In the movie, he's okay with this sudden flight. In the novel the movie is based on, simply titled *FernGully* by Diana Young, Zak is not so keen on it, saying:

"We're hanging in space in case you haven't noticed… My body feels so light!" he said."

Crysta explains:

"That's because it is. That's the magic of fairy love. We share the same feelings now."

These two are clearly attempting to initiate a physical relationship with each other but it's not quite working out. It's still awkward, but comes off as sweet. Although people likely won't be able to relate to the flying part, the rest of this interaction might feel a little familiar. Why? Because Zak and Crysta represent the first sexual theme in this movie: the sweet and awkward innocence of your first love/first sexual encounter. They weren't about to show a full sex scene in a family movie, obviously. But it's clear that this is what the grotto scene is meant to represent.

I know what you're thinking: "So the main romantic relationship of the movie gets a teensy bit steamy, so what?" We're just getting started, that's what. Speaking of steam, our next subject is the movie's villain. When you're casting the main villain of an animated family film, who would come to mind to voice them? If your answer is one of the, if not THE, biggest celebrity sex symbol of all time, you'd be right. That is the case for *FernGully*'s main antagonist, Hexxus, voiced by none other than Dr. Frank N. Furter, himself: Tim Curry. Hexxus takes on many forms during the film, the main one being a human-shaped smoke (or steam) monster. He is described by Magi as a "force of destruction" that began as a natural being like the fairies but became even further corrupted and empowered over time with the help of humans. Hexxus' villain song, "Toxic Love," is perhaps the most talked about part of the film and with good reason. It's been noted many times by listeners that it's sung in a remarkably sexually charged manner, particularly the chorus that involves repeated suggestive grunting. Another thing that most people don't know is that the version that was used in the final cut of the film is actually shortened. The full version of "Toxic Love" can be heard on the soundtrack, in which Hexxus describes himself as "a special kind of horny." It's clear to fans and casual viewers alike that Hexxus enjoys the act of polluting to the point of sexual gratification. This leads him to

senselessly destroy the forest and all the life within it for no other reason than the fact that he gets off to it.

In the theme of sexuality in the movie's plot, Hexxus serves to represent out of control destructive hedonism. This is a perfect contrast to our protagonist's role in the theme as the sweet, innocent awkward first love. I believe a handful of comments I've chosen from a YouTube video of the song can explain it better than I can. One user named 'jmasterflash720' says; *"I swear my clothes were on at the start of the video."* User 'robgarcia1181' provides a slightly more in depth take on the number: "*Pollution made from greed. No wonder the monster was so charming and alluring, just like the riches greed can provide."* It brings up another reason why our villain who represents environmental corruption is quite so sexualized. Pollution, simply put, is a sin. What else do people affiliate with sin? I searched for a very long time for this YouTube comment I read about "Toxic Love" once but I have failed to find it. I remember it going something like this" "*Recycling and environmentalism is what you want people to know about you doing. Pollution is the kinky hookup you had last night that you don't want people to know you were doing.*" The urge to be lazy, litter and pollute is a part of our id, much the same way our sexual urges are. From this perspective, it's really no wonder a noxious puff of smoke became the number one reason why the theme of this movie has so much to do with sex.

Now you're saying "Ok, fine. The villain is hyper sexualized. Lots of villains are, even in animated family movies. I'm still not convinced!" Settle down, pumpkins. We're still not through. It wouldn't be a proper *FernGully* study if I didn't address the most "superfluous" element in the film. I put that word in quotation marks because it only *seems* superfluous at first glance. However, it very well be anything but. I'm of course referring to a character known only as 'Goanna' and his song "If I'm Gonna

Eat Somebody (It Might As Well Be You)" sung by Ton Loc. Ever since The Nostalgia Critic released his review of *FernGully* in 2009, this song has been referred to as "The Big Lipped Alligator Moment." Defined by Lindsay Ellis in the review as "*a scene that comes right the f*ck out of nowhere, has little to no bearing whatsoever on the plot, is way over the top in terms of ridiculousness, even within the context of the movie and after it happens, no one ever speaks of it again*."

I could give you the practical explanation for this song's existence: In the original source material of the *FernGully* novel, a Goanna does indeed show up and attempts to eat Zak. When Crysta stops him, he says his only line in the book: "*But I have to eat* ***somebody***." Then *FernGully's* creative team took a trip down to the Australian rainforest to get inspired for the film and came across a lounge of Goannas. They tossed some cooked pieces of chicken to them and were intrigued when said Goannas began smashing the chicken against rocks to make them easier to consume. But you clicked on this essay and read the title knowing good and well what you were getting yourself into. I think Doug Walker's comment on the song that elicited the "Big Lipped Alligator" definition from Ellis sums it up most succinctly: *"What is this character? He just comes out of nowhere, singing this kind of* ***sexual*** *song about how he's gonna eat Zak."*

We have our second song in the soundtrack that is sexually charged for no apparent reason. For years, I listened to the people saying there was no reason for "If I'm Gonna Eat Somebody" to exist, whatsoever (and for a long time, I even agreed with this sentiment). Allow me to be the very first person to say there absolutely *is* a reason, if you consider the sexual theme the rest of the movie is following.

Crysta and Zak represent one side of a sexual relationship: Wholesome first love. Hexxus represents the opposite side: Destructive, out of control hedonism. But

what about the middle ground? The ground where you'll likely find a lizard slinking around for its next meal? Goanna is a much less complex creature than the film's protagonists and antagonist and acts according to his natural instincts. Describing them as a "primal need" and a hunger that he "just can't control." Another point the song makes is that when he gets "hungry" enough, he's not at all picky about who he deems worthy enough to predate upon. He sets his sights upon Zak even though he's never even heard of humans. In the context of the other sexual elements in the movie, Goanna represents casual sex. Goanna's urge to fulfill his needs are the neutral middle ground that completes and connects the spectrum of ways each character in this movie relates to their own respective sexuality.

I'd be completely remiss if I didn't mention my favorite character from this movie, even though he doesn't say anything too sexually risqué in the film's final cut. But, similar to the Hexxus, the extended version of his song, "Batty Rap" is another matter, entirely. Batty Koda, a bat who escaped from being a test subject in a biology lab, is voiced by another late legend: Robin Williams, the Certified King of recorded dialogue that got cut either because he went on too long, or the material was too raunchy. Rumor has it that while recording his lines for *FernGully*, which predates even that of the Genie's lines in *Aladdin*, Williams' dialogue was cut for both reasons.

The cut portion of "Batty Rap" takes a rather unexpected turn in the middle, where we seem to get a glimpse into Batty's psyche and memories. We hear echoing voices of doctors and nurses making comments about the experiments that were performed on the poor bat during his time as a prisoner in the lab. A robotic voice can be heard noting that "the eye makeup when inserted rectally has some effect." They thankfully leave out exactly what the effect is. Later on in the song, Batty lists off his

lingering physical ailments as sciatica, chapped lips and *jock itch*, in that order. *"Like a rocket in my pocket and I need to scratch."* Perhaps the most befuddling of Williams' ad-libbed additions to "Batty Rap" would be another spoken line from the "flashback" portion of the song would be when he realizes in a noticeably alarmed tone, "*Oh my god, I'm reading by my genitals*." I've asked several people over the years what Williams supposedly even meant by this line. The consensus is that, due to the bizarre and inhumane science experiments Batty was forced to undergo, his dick has the tendency to glow, allowing him to read things in the dark. This alleged condition that Batty apparently suffers from is never mentioned nor utilized in the movie(most likely with good reason). However, I find it quite surprising that this line made it into the extended version of "Batty Rap" at all, instead of being left and forgotten on the cutting room floor.

This is the part of the essay where I plan to list off all the fetishes present in the film, strictly off the top of my head. I will undoubtedly miss a few, if years of following the "dirtydisneyconfessions" Tumblr blog back when it was still around has taught me anything. But I can recall at least a dozen without issue or a re-watch.

Transformation: The scene where Crysta attempts to restore Zaks human size but instead causes him to morph into the vague shapes of others animals, much to Batty's amusement.

Vore: Please refer back to the section of this essay about Goanna.

Furries: This one is fairly obvious as many characters in this movie can count as "furries." Goanna could count as one and also a "scalie."

Bondage: Perhaps not *classic* bondage per se, like when a person is tied up by rope or vines. But there are moments that can count as that or, as some call it, "stuck

fetish." During Goanna's song (geez, there are even more sexual moments involving Goanna than I originally thought…), Zak gets stuck on the sticky underside of a snail while trying to escape him. Also, both Zak and Crysta get stuck to a spider web and, by extension, each other, on a log about to be demolished in a wood grinder before Batty saves them.

Macrophilia: Zak first appears in his human form and is much larger than Crysta.

Microphilia: Crysta, in her natural form, is much smaller than Zak. These scenes with major size differences are brief but I'm sure they last for enough time for it to have affected somebody.

Barefoot: The fairies in this movie do not wear shoes.

Mud: This technically doesn't count as "stuck fetish" because, once more as Zak is fleeing from Goanna, he falls into the mud and slides through it on his belly, swiftly and easily.

Belly Play: Speaking of bellies, there's a scene where Zak is captured by a group of fairy thugs called the Beetle Boys. They're holding Zak upside-down by his feet. His top is sliding downward revealing his bare belly which one of the Beetle Boys decides to lick with his freakishly long tongue.

Long Tongue: The Beetle Boy isn't the only one with a long tongue. Goanna catches Zak at the end of his musical number as he's falling, then slowly wraps it around Zak.

Licking: Please refer back to the two previously listed fetishes.

Slime Monster: In Hexxus' first form, he appears as a mobile mass of brown sludge (not unlike the symbiotes of the Marvel comics).

Suckling: In his slime form, Hexxus slugdes around, placing his lips on different mechanical parts of the leveler and sucks out the smoke and pollution the machine creates. His first line in the movie is *"Mmm, delicious, first-class mother's milk."*

Yaoi: Many online female fans ship Zak with Pips, feeling that the two have more sexual chemistry with each other than either of them do with Crysta.

One of my personal favorite aspects of *FernGully* is a bit more subtle. There's more than just phallic imagery present. Andre Osmond explains in his book *100 Animated Feature Films* about the yonic imagery used toward the end of the film. *"Let down by her man, Crysta uses her feminine powers. […] In the finale, Crysta plucks a seedling from a vaginal looking pod and takes a kamikaze flight into Hexxus' red jaws. Roots burst from the monster's body, not killing it but sealing it in a wooden womb."*

But what does it all mean? Now, you may be wondering what the point of placing all this sexual imagery, suggestiveness and fetishes into a movie that is supposed to be about saving the rainforest even is. I have two personal theories to answer this question. One I've heard is that animators often don't get paid enough for their work. This means that they are doing what they do out of pure passion. Along with that passion comes the tendency to put what turns them on into their work. The second theory is one I came up with on my own and is quite simple, really. I believe, as the age-old adage goes: Sex sells. Or, in *FernGully*'s case, sex makes your movie memorable. Ironic, considering how little people actually remember it. But I don't think it's because the sexual aspects don't stay with them. I just think more popular movies have stolen the spotlight, so to speak. I also believe that it's only natural that a movie about nature should have a little bit about "human nature" thrown into it, as well.

As you can see the themes are all there. Hopefully someday if or when *FernGully* ever has a resurgence in popularity, people may return to it and see it all

for themselves. With Amazon (perhaps the most ironic company to be named after a *literal* rainforest) claiming they have plan to give it the live action re-make treatment, that time may be coming sooner than we all think.

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